

#### 4) **The good qualities of the Buddhas enlightened activities**

Ashvagosha's ***Praise in Honor of One Worthy of Honor*** says:

*What trouble is there from which  
You cannot lead sentient beings?  
What excellent thing is there  
That you cannot bestow on the world?*

Buddhas work unceasingly, tirelessly, and effortlessly for the benefit of each and every sentient being. Due to their perfect wisdom they *know* what is most beneficial, and due to their perfect compassion they indiscriminately *act* according to what is most beneficial.

However, even though the Buddhas' actions of body, speech, and mind are constantly directed to the welfare of others, they can only be beneficial if disciples are willing to practice. Therefore, an analogy for Buddhas' enlightened activities is the sun that shines effortlessly and impartially on the earth. But in order to benefit from the sun's light and warmth one needs to step outside and leave the dark places the rays of the sun cannot reach.

Another analogy is the reflection of the moon in water. Just as countless bodies of clean water reflect the moon, countless qualified disciples receive the benefit of Buddhas' activities. However, just as the moon cannot be reflected in murky water, the compassionate actions of Buddhas cannot benefit those who are not ready to receive help.

Therefore, the power of negative karma can be stronger than the power of the Buddhas, for if powerful negative karma ripens in the mental continua of sentient beings even the Buddhas may temporarily be unable to help them.

#### ii. **The good qualities of the Dharma**

Having reflected on the good qualities of the Buddha, we should now reflect on the good qualities of the Dharma. Buddhas reached the state of perfection in dependence on the *Dharma of scripture* and the *Dharma of realization*; i.e. they attained enlightenment by actualizing the teachings (the *Dharma of scripture*) and in dependence on cultivating Arya paths and eliminating obstructions (the *Dharma of realizations*). As explained above, in the widest sense, the Dharma refers to the teachings and in a stricter sense to Arya paths and cessations of obstructions. However, the Dharma also refers to the meditations/practices that lead to Arya paths and cessations. Therefore, listening, contemplating and meditating on the teachings are also the Dharma Jewel.

Furthermore, Buddhas are born from and hence the result of the Dharma; they are emanations of the Dharma Jewel.

The Buddha says in the ***Compendium of Teachings (Dharma-samgiti)***:

*These Bhagavan Buddhas possess limitless and infinite qualities.  
Such qualities are born from the teachings and from the proper practice  
of the teachings. The teachings create and govern them. They arise from  
the teachings and are within the scope of the teachings. They depend on the  
teachings and the teachings produce them.*

#### iii. **The good qualities of the Sangha**

The qualities of the Sangha are beautifully expressed in the ***Compendium of Teachings (Dharma-samgiti)***:

*The Sangha teach the Dharma, practice the Dharma, and reflect upon the Dharma. They are a field  
of the Dharma; they hold the Dharma and rely upon it. They venerate the Dharma and engage in the  
activities of the Dharma. The Dharma is their sphere of activity and they are the wonderful  
practitioners of the Dharma. They are naturally honest and naturally pure. Compassion is their  
subject and they are endowed with compassion. They always embrace solitude. They are always  
absorbed in the Dharma. They always perform virtuous actions. This is how you should think of the  
Dharma.*

As explained above, the Sangha refers in a stricter sense to Aryas, in a wider sense to monastics, and in an even wider sense to the community of Buddhist practitioners. The Sangha described here are the spiritual community of Aryas we should rely on in order to progress on the spiritual path.

Thus, the Sangha constitute serious practitioners who delight in listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma. They are a field of the Dharma, for they teach and assist others in their practice. Since they live in accordance with the Dharma they venerate and honor it. They are honest, earnest, and free from deceit. Having overcome attachment to Samsara and possibly Nirvana, they embrace solitude.

## **2. The way to take refuge by knowing the distinctions (of the three Jewels)**

There are six subcategories that demonstrate how to differentiate the three Jewels and how to take refuge in each of them:

- a) The distinction based on their defining characteristics
- b) The distinction based on their activities
- c) The distinction based on devotion
- d) The distinction based on practice
- e) The distinction based on recollection
- f) The distinction based on how to increase merit

### *a) The distinction based on their defining characteristics*

The distinguishing or defining characteristic of the Buddha Jewel is full and perfect enlightenment. It refers to full awakening, to actualizing the fullest potential of the mental consciousness by removing everything that obscures it.

The distinguishing characteristic of the Dharma Jewel is that it arises from the Buddha Jewel. During the explanation of the good qualities of the Dharma, the Dharma Jewel was presented as the cause of the Buddha. Here Asanga presents a different perspective, for the scriptural Dharma the Buddha taught after his enlightenment as well as the subsequent Arya paths and cessation that are generated in the continua of Shravakas (Hearers), Pratyekabuddhas (Solitary Realizers), and Bodhisattvas arise in dependence on the Buddha.

The distinguishing quality of the Sangha Jewel is that they engage in serious practice in dependence on the Dharma of scripture that they received from others.

### *b) The distinction based on their activities*

The distinctive activity of the Buddha is to teach beings according to their predispositions, aptitudes, and aspirations. Like an extremely skilful physician who gives the perfect prescription, the Buddha gives perfect instructions to each and every disciple.

The distinctive activity of the Dharma is to eradicate afflictive and cognitive obstructions. Therefore, the Dharma is compared to the perfect medicine able to overcome all shortcomings.

The distinctive activity of the Sangha is to take delight in dedicated practice and to foster enthusiasm in others. They are compared to skilful nurses who assist and encourage patients to undergo and continue treatment.

### *c) The distinction based on devotion*

Since the three Jewels possess different characteristics and different functions, we should devote ourselves to them accordingly. The proper way we should devote ourselves to the Buddha is to regard him as the one who is to be honored and served. The proper way to devote ourselves to the Dharma is to regard it as that which is to be actualized within our mental continuum. Devoting ourselves to the Sangha entails regarding them as the spiritual community we associate with and respect as invaluable true spiritual friends.

### *d) The distinction based on practice*

This category refers to putting the three different ways of devoting ourselves to the three Jewels into practice. We should make offerings and be of service to the Buddha. Since the most valuable offering is the offering of practice we should listen to what he says and implement his teachings. Regarding the Dharma, it is not merely to be revered as an external object of worship but to be internalized. Therefore, we should try to take any teaching as a personal instruction, and relate it to our own personal experience. We should learn to relate it to whatever we are doing, whatever we are saying, and whatever is going on in our mind.

